



Vulnerable Adults Working Group

Meeting Minutes

September 16, 2011, 1:00pm – 2:30pm

Shriver Center - 50 East Washington St. Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60602

Action Items:

1. Nancy Nelson will share contact information for Lucia West Jones, Northeastern Illinois Agency on Aging.
2. Dan will work with Feeding Illinois staff to begin drafting recommendations.

Minutes:

1. **Attendance:** *Dan Lesser (Sargent Shriver Center on National Poverty Law), Linda Diamond Shapiro (Access Community Health), Allison Forrer (Feeding Illinois), Eithne McMenamin (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless), Interns, Carissa Gomez (Feeding Illinois), Barry Taylor (Equip for Equality), Shriver Center Interns*

On the phone: *Tracy Smith (Feeding Illinois), Kate Maehr (Greater Chicago Food Depository), Doug Schenkelberg (Greater Chicago Food Depository), Nancy Nelson (AARP), Jan Freeman (Illinois Department of Human Services), Terry Solomon (African-American Family Commission), Juanita Irizarry (The Chicago Community Trust)*

Absent: *Betsy Creamer (Illinois Department on Aging), Kappy Scates (Scates Farms), Amy Rynell (Heartland Alliance), Cristal Thomas (Governor's Office), Mark Ishaug (AIDS United), Barbara Wylie (Eastern Illinois University), Deborah Hinde (Heartland Alliance), Bob Gallo (AARP), Amy White (Senior Services of Central Illinois)*

2. **Working group goals and recommendation form:** Staff will work with Dan to begin forming these.

3. **Review recommendation focus areas**

- a. Optimization of SNAP usage
- b. Maximizing opportunities within Older Americans Act
- c. Education and outreach
- d. Program coordination and integration

4. **SNAP and Older Adults – Allison Forrer** (refer to attached document “Vulnerable Adults Working Group_SNAP and Older Adults_9.13.11”)

- a. Significantly less participation in SNAP than the rest of the population. 35% participation in FY 2008 for older adults compared to 67% of all eligible individuals.

- b. Most vulnerable group are adults whose ages at 50-59. Not eligible for “senior” programs but have a high rate of disability.
- c. In several rural counties there are large pockets of concentrated older adults who are under 200% of the poverty line (refer to chart).
- d. Several barriers were discussed including: uncomfortable with receiving “handouts,” feeling it is too difficult to go through the application process or not understanding how to proceed, believing the benefit will not be worth the effort and many different access issues (transportation, technology).
- e. Best Practices:
 - i. Demonstration project for Simplified Medical Deduction
 - ii. Simplified Application
 - iii. Increased Outreach through standard and nonstandard entry points
 - iv. Targeted senior outreach

5. Discuss access barriers and potential recommendations for target populations

a. Older Adults:

- i. Not fully understanding the application process or find it difficult to use.
- ii. There is a lot of misinformation about SNAP and the extent of hunger issues that needs to be dispelled.
- iii. Recommending to the SNAP Outreach Grant to target outreach to certain populations. There is some going on in Southern IL to perform targeted outreach.
- iv. Should reach out to Lucia West Jones, Northeastern Illinois Agency on Aging, Nancy Nelson will share contact information.
- v. Doug recommended suggesting to the state to recommend that they partner in their outreach plan to specific organizations that target special populations – could help to build a larger network.
- vi. What would it take to create more application “outposts”? What issues are creating difficulties to go through the application process? Problems with application. It could be done on a computer but then still have to mail or fax verifications, or bring them in for interviews (sometimes can be done over the phone). – Possible recommendation is to send in scanned documentation.

- vii. An issue sometimes is to have someone remain on SNAP. Reapplication seems difficult for older adults in particular. DHS will start mailing out redetermination application along with notice of benefits ending. This will be happening across the board to anyone who doesn't qualify for a phone interview.
- viii. Would be helpful for agencies who serve older adults to be notified when changes to the process/updates happen.
- ix. How do we streamline the process so that anyone could understand how to access benefits? How do we teach those who are in direct contact with those that need services to coach them through the process. Doug pointed to the Healthy Chicago Plan - their recommendation is around a prescription process as a voucher for services.

b. People with disabilities – Barry Taylor, Equip for Equality

i. Challenges:

- 1. Physical access to DHS or outreach offices
- 2. Communication access (deaf)
- 3. Alternate formats of materials. Some that are blind need Braille however all that are blind do not know how to read Braille. Sometimes there is just the need for larger print.
- 4. Websites can't be used by those who are blind. Sometimes use screen readers but some sites don't work. Often can't read PDF documents.
- 5. Service animal issues. Misperception that all who use them are blind which is incorrect.
- 6. Intellectual disabilities – needing to make reasonable accommodations – may need someone to read and explain information,; difficulties with emotions.
- 7. Issues with family member exploitation
- 8. Barriers with transit access. Better utilize para-transit systems.

ii. Possible Solutions:

- 1. Centers for Independent Living could be a great point of access for those with disabilities to apply for SNAP. (Access Living – Chicago) INSIL (Anne Ford, Executive Director)

2. Illinois Legal Aid Online – web based resource. Sometimes have documents posted, could add benefit documents online.

c. Other Barriers

- i. Chronic Medical Conditions
 1. Finding nontraditional application points
 2. There is a universal application but sometimes that does create issues with making it less simple to apply.
- ii. Language barriers: Not always considered are those who do not speak English and have other barriers (example: individual who only speaks Spanish and is blind).
- iii. Homeless Populations
 1. Homeless Youth: currently fulltime students can't access benefits. May have City Colleges to help give benefits.
 2. Ex-offender issues:
 - a. Often given misinformation about how they can/can't qualify, sometimes even coming from caseworkers.
 - b. Is there a better way to connect those leaving incarceration with benefits? Could be paired with discharge planning from prison/jail.
 - c. Part of one's eligibility is determined by household situation. This is often a difficult situation for ex-offenders.
 3. Issues with the actual food that can be received with SNAP benefits.
Population may not have access to a place to store and prepare food.
- iv. How do we make it a standard from service providers to offer SNAP as part of benefits they discuss?
- v. More public/private partnerships for dispensing information on SNAP (grocers, pharmacists)
- vi. Education campaign to reduce stigmatization of using benefits of those who need them and the rest of the public.

6. Debrief of Listening Tour events and upcoming Listening Tour events

a. Most Recent:

i. DuPage:

1. Income often exceeds eligibility requirements for SNAP

2. Population unfamiliar with how to access benefits

- ii. **Cairo:**

1. Transportation is expensive and population with spread out making delivery of services difficult
 2. Many feel uncomfortable accessing benefits and are afraid of the stigma
 3. Few retail businesses to provide private response

- b. **Upcoming:**

- i. **Rockford, October 6**

- ii. **Marion, October 19**

- iii. **Chicago, October 28**

- 7. Upcoming full commission meeting, September 26**

- a. Refining issues
 - b. Who will be assisting with research and recommendations

- 8. Heat and Eat update:** Sent memo to IDHS. Waiting to hear their reaction. This program may become a recommendation.

- 9. October meeting date:** October 21, 1-2:30pm, Shriver Center-50 East Washington St. Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60602

SNAP and Older Adults

Participation, Demographics, and Barriers

Participation

- Nationally, the estimated SNAP participation rate for older adults, 60 and older, was just 35 percent in FY 2008 while an estimated 67 percent of all eligible individuals participated in SNAP.¹
- A similar situation exists in Illinois, where the estimated older adult SNAP participation rate was only 40 percent compared to an estimated 80 percent of all eligible individuals in FY 2006.^{2,3}
- Of the 7 million seniors who are eligible for SNAP in the United States, only about 2.4 million are now signed up for the program⁴

Demographics

- In 2008, approximately 5 million, or 10 percent of people age 60 and over, had incomes below the poverty threshold in the U.S.⁵ Approximately 16.4 million, or 31 percent of older adults, were low-income (had incomes below 185 percent of the poverty threshold).⁶
- Analysis of data from the Current Population Survey's (CPS) Food Security Supplement shows that in 2009, about **19 percent of low-income households** with adults ages 60 and over were **food insecure**.⁷ Looking at the entire population of elderly households (60 and over) across all income levels, 8.6% were food insecure.⁸
- While the discussion around older adults tends to focus on age 60 or 65 and older, recently released research from AARP suggests that adults ages 50-59 experienced particularly acute increases in food insecurity during 2007-2009, and that the same age group has a high rate of disability. "The share of food insecure adults age 50-59 reporting a disability is 10 percentage points higher than those food insecure adults who are younger or older."⁹ Since this group is not eligible for "senior" programs or expanded income eligibility, they may deserve special attention.¹⁰

¹ Cunyningham, Karen. State Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Eligibility and Participation Among Elderly Individuals. Mathematica. September, 2010, page xi.

² USDA FNS, Reaching those in Need, State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2008, page 5.

³ Cunyningham, 62.

⁴ SNAP Primer, What's the Benefit? , AARP, September 2010, http://www.aarp.org/giving-back/charitable-giving/info-09-2010/snap_what_is_the_benefit_why_dont_more_people_enroll.1.html

⁵ GAO-11-237 Older Americans Act: More Should be Done to Measure the Extent of Unmet Need for Services, February 2011, page 6.

⁶ GAO-11-237 Older Americans Act: More Should be Done to Measure the Extent of Unmet Need for Services, February 2011, page 6.

⁷ GAO-11-782T Nutrition Assistance: Additional Efficiencies Could Improve Services to Older Adults, page 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ James Ziliak, Ph.D and Craig Gunderson, Ph.D, "Food Insecurity Among Older Adults." A report submitted to the AARP Foundation, August 2011.

¹⁰ Ziliak and Gunderson, 2.

In Illinois, adults 60 and older are subject to expanded income eligibility guidelines for SNAP benefits, and may qualify if their income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. The chart below shows where some of these potentially eligible residents are concentrated in Illinois. In some rural counties, the number of potentially eligible older adults may be small, but the concentration is high, possibly due to reduced economic opportunities and the aging of the rural population. Considering high percentage counties and high number counties gives two ways to geographically target vulnerable older adults. A map is included at the end for reference.

15 Illinois counties with the highest percentage of the population who are 65 and older with incomes under 200% of the poverty line ¹¹ . (Number of residents in parentheses).		15 Illinois counties with the highest number of the population who are 65 and older with incomes under 200% of the poverty line ¹²	
Alexander County, Illinois	10.95% (904)	Cook County, Illinois	200352
Hardin County, Illinois	10.72% (479)	DuPage County, Illinois	18136
Hamilton County, Illinois	9.59% (785)	Lake County, Illinois	13638
Pulaski County, Illinois	8.90% (572)	Will County, Illinois	12307
Gallatin County, Illinois	8.09% (479)	Winnebago County, Illinois	11641
Wayne County, Illinois	7.95% (1312)	Madison County, Illinois	10638
Calhoun County, Illinois	7.84% (398)	St. Clair County, Illinois	10321
Edwards County, Illinois	7.75% (506)	Kane County, Illinois	9968
Union County, Illinois	7.73% (1397)	Peoria County, Illinois	6871
Richland County, Illinois	7.72% (1206)	Sangamon County, Illinois	6784
Scott County, Illinois	7.67% (402)	Rock Island County, Illinois	6663
Saline County, Illinois	7.54% (1954)	McHenry County, Illinois	5951
Hancock County, Illinois	7.53% (1410)	LaSalle County, Illinois	5316
Franklin County, Illinois	7.20% (2830)	Macon County, Illinois	5236
Clay County, Illinois	6.95% (954)	Tazewell County, Illinois	4809

Barriers to participation

Most of these barriers have been described in multiple publications, including resources from the GAO, FRAC, AARP, and Feeding America.

- Perceptions about SNAP¹³:

¹¹ 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Custom Table, Age by Ratio of Income to Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months; Total Population. Data given at 65 and older based on available increments from American Community Survey.

¹² 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Custom Table, Age by Ratio of Income to Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months; Total Population.

¹³ SNAP Primer, AARP

- Not wanting to “take a handout.”
- Fearing the stigma of using food stamps.
- Fearing that taking food stamps will deprive others of benefits.
- Some find that the SNAP application process, including income and expense verification, is too burdensome or intrusive.
- Misinformation and confusion about SNAP:
 - Not knowing how to apply or whether they qualify.
 - Feeling that the benefit is negligible for the amount of effort required to apply (minimum benefit is \$16 a month, but average for this group was \$89 a month in FY2007).¹⁴
 - Lack of knowledge about program eligibility rules and benefit levels.
- Challenges with access:
 - Problems with transportation - GAO survey of agencies finds transportation to be the most requested of support services from older adults.¹⁵
 - While some federal programs fund transportation for older adults (Medicaid, Department of Transportation, United We Ride), SNAP Outreach does not, and access to local offices can be a challenge, especially in rural areas.
 - Technology challenges – lack of comfort with online or phone application and redetermination processes.

Best Practices

Best practices for connecting older adults with SNAP benefits appear in many of the resources referenced in this memo. However, testimony to Congress from Feeding America and a Mathematica Policy Research report on SNAP trends within the elderly population appropriately summarize the most common strategies.¹⁶

- Simplified Medical Deduction
 - Illinois recently implemented this as a 5-year demonstration project starting June 2011.
 - Applicants who are over 60 or disabled must verify that they have \$36 or more in allowable medical expenses to qualify for the \$245 medical standard deduction.
 - Since SNAP benefit amounts take income, expenses, and deductions into consideration, this is likely to increase the monthly benefit amount for many older adults.
- Simplified Application – waive face-to-face interviews and some income requirements.
- Simplified Elderly Reporting – reduce reporting requirements (redetermination requirements) for qualifying households.
- Increased outreach

¹⁴ Cunnynggham, 33.

¹⁵ GAO, Older Americans Act, page 22.

¹⁶ Cunnynggham, Karen, State Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Eligibility and Participation Among Elderly Individuals.

- Increase awareness of programs such as the Standard Medical Deduction, and address concerns over benefit amount and application process.
- Targeted senior outreach through senior-specific sites, call center data matching, etc.
 - Benefits Data Trust (BDT) is the primary example of a non-profit using data matching and a call center to target older adults who receive one benefit, but are not receiving others for which they may be eligible. BDT has made use of the 2008 Farm Bill option to use telephonic signatures for SNAP applications, enabling them to do most of their outreach and application assistance over the phone.
- SSI Combined Application Projects (CAPs) – streamlined application for those on SSI, partnership between FNS and SSA to use consistent deductions
 - NIFNAP (Northern Illinois Food and Nutrition Partnership) worked on this starting in 2006, and saw a small (1%) increase in SSI households receiving food stamps as a result of increased outreach and information.

